Thousands of files on JFK's murder released to public

By Tim Weiner
The New York Times

WASHINGTON — From the raw record of a national nightmare, committed to paper, stamped top secret and filed away for 30 years: a 1959 urinalysis of Lee Harvey Oswald; frantic requests for dossiers on the man arrested as John F. Kennedy's assassin; ballistics tests on the mail-order rifle; a scale model of the grassy knoll.

The National Archives' huge cache of government documents on the assassination of President Kennedy was opened Monday, offering a treasure trove for conspiracy theorists, a wealth of arcane details for historians and a bottomless pit of memory, loss and mystery for those who recall the president's murder. Included were 90,000 pages of documents from the Central Intelligence Agency, thousands of presidential papers, investigative files, photographs and

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The Warren Commission ruled in 1964 that Oswald, acting alone, killed the president with two shots from a cheap mail-order rifle fired from the sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository in downtown Dallas.

A House select committee concluded in 1979 that Oswald killed the president with two shots, but that there was evidence to support a theory that a third shot may have come from a grassy knoll across the plaza.

Among the Warren Commission's most controversial findings was what conspiracy theorists have ridiculed as the "magic bullet" conclusion — that one of the shots Oswald fired passed through the president, hit Connally in the back, moved through his chest, passed through his right wrist, entered his left thigh and later showed up, largely intact, on a hospital stretcher. Conspiracy theorists say one bullet could not have traveled so tortuous a route.

"A reasonable person could conclude either that Oswald acted alone or that there was a second

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memorandums.

The files show how the CIA scrambled hours after the assassination on Nov. 22, 1963, to locate dossiers on Oswald (they found 30). They record a CIA official's fear that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was tailing him as he met with the mobster the CIA had hired to kill Fidel Castro. They include a thousand shards of evidence, and thousands more of hearsay, rumor, gossip, innuendo and nonsense.

Since thousands of CIA records and other materials remain classified, pieces still are missing from the puzzle. And the information disclosed amounted to less than the 1,053 boxes of materials opened Monday. A surprisingly large number of the documents consisted of newspaper clippings stamped secret by the CIA and multiple copies of the same report from different files.

But for those who believe that the assassination was the sole work of Oswald, an ex-Marine who had failed in nearly every endeavor, including an attempt to defect to Moscow, the newly released documents offer the final proof. For those who believe that Oswald did not act alone, the documents also offer substantiation.

"This will feed another generation of assassination buffs, the children of assassination buffs," said Edward Jay Epstein, who wrote three books and an anthology on the assassination.

The assassination spawned many theories — the Soviets did it, the Cubans did it, the Mafia did it — but the files appear to hold no smoking gun. It was reaction to and revulsion toward an unusually ornate assassination theory — the 1991 movie "JFK" directed by Oliver Stone, which posits that a team of military officers and intelligence officials plotted the killing — that prompted Congress to order the files opened by Monday.

Most of the documents pored over all day by researchers and reporters were long-secret materials reviewed by two government commissions that had studied the assassination.

shooter," said G. Robert Blakey, chief counsel to the House committee. "The single best explanation was that if there were a second shooter, there was involvement of organized crime."

That latter explanation has fueled fascinated speculation.

The organized-crime element to which Blakey referred was a New Orleans faction presided over by Santos Trafficante. The material made public Monday includes CIA documents describing how the agency's leaders in 1960 asked an organized crime figure, Johnny Roselli, to arrange for "the liquidation of Fidel Castro," which the documents described as "a sensitive mission requiring gangster-type action." Roselli, in turn, asked for the help of Trafficante, who undertook several failed plots to kill Castro.

After the Kennedy assassination, Roselli's contact in the CIA became nervous about meeting him in public, certain that the FBI was spying on the meetings, the documents show. Roselli's body was found in a 55-gallon oil drum floating off the Florida coast in 1976.